

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

A PUBLICATION OF

DESERT WATERS CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH

A NONPROFIT FOR THE WELL-BEING OF PUBLIC SAFETY STAFF AND THEIR FAMILIES

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The Process of Dialogue 2008, 2016 © Caterina Spinaris, PhD

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Dialogue (dī'ə lôg', -lăg')

1. a talking together; conversation
2. interchange and discussion of ideas, especially when open and frank, as in seeking mutual understanding or harmony

From Yourdictionary.com

I heard once that we have one mouth but two ears because we need to listen twice as much as we speak. The need for careful and strategic listening is always in order. However, it is probably never greater than when we find ourselves in disagreement with others—holding contrasting viewpoints—whether in our professional lives or in our private dealings.

Interacting with others includes experiencing friction with them at times, with "iron sharpening iron." Whether it is administrators negotiating with unions, supervisors confronting subordinates, parents clashing with teen children, or spouses disagreeing, conflict happens.

When we experience a disagreement, our first urge is to try to convince the other party that our way of thinking is the right one, and so have our views and preferences prevail—and thus "win" the argument.

Conflict resolution experts suggest, however, that, when at an impasse with others, we need to dialogue with them if we want to enjoy possible mutually satisfactory resolutions, and to preserve relationships.

One goal of dialoguing is to look for common ground with people with whom we disagree. That is why the essence of successful dialogue is exploratory in nature. It aims to help both parties identify and clarify complexities and nuances about their positions.

(Continued on page 2)

The Process of Dialogue (continued from page 1)

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If arguing to win resembles a fierce game of tennis, dialoguing looks like deep-sea diving with the other party in each other's territory with the goal of bringing discovered treasures to the surface from BOTH parties' territory.

Effective dialoguing requires approaching each other with the goal to better understand each other's history, needs, interests, context and foundational assumptions. Dialoguing also seeks to identify what is acceptable, valuable and meaningful to each party. This takes having a vested interest in long-term outcomes, not just short-lived victories.

Dialoguing presumes that all parties involved hold pieces of the puzzle, that they all have validity in their perspective. Through dialoguing all parties involved have the opportunity to recognize the value of each other's stance, and to acknowledge that the other party's contributions can advance and enrich everyone's thinking. This takes objectivity, generosity of spirit, and a realistic self-assessment.

While engaging in dialogue all parties are expected to present their positions, while at the same time remaining willing to reevaluate them in light of additional evidence. This takes integrity, courage and flexibility.

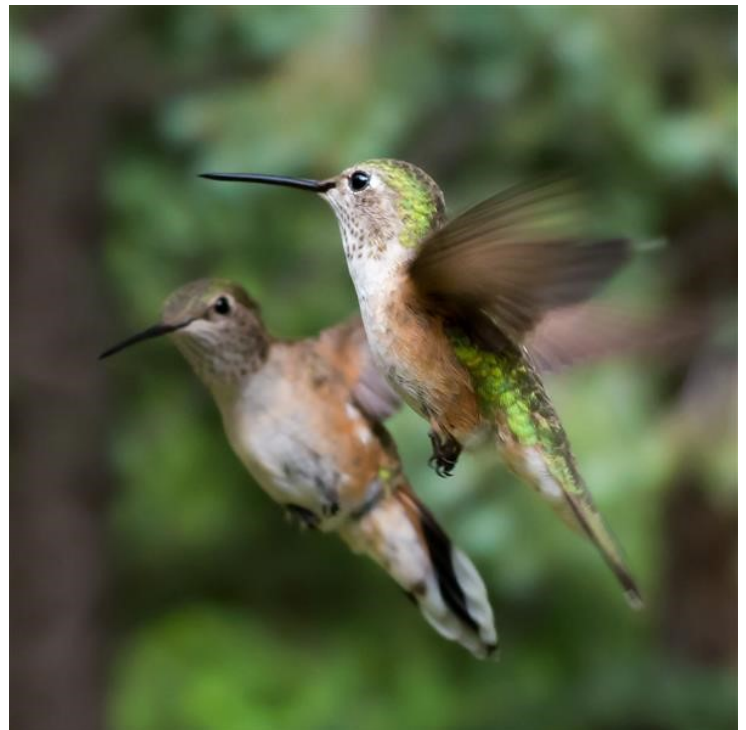
Dialoguing is built upon respect of the other party, humility to accept that we don't have all the answers, self-control and patience with the process of discovery and discussion, and the desire to maintain a working relationship with those with whom we are dialoguing.

Ultimately, dialogue conducted effectively can help all parties come up with creative new possibilities to address their disagreements. For example, instead of verbally attacking someone over their doing something in a certain way, dialoguing entails both parties presenting their positions. Topics to be covered include the reasons for one party's displeasure with the other party's actions; alternatives that the objecting party is proposing instead; the other party's reasons for doing things in their particular way; areas that would be impacted by change and also by lack of change of how things are done; and possible ways to combine elements of the two approaches (if feasible) in order to address both parties' agendas and needs more effectively.

Of course all this takes maturity of character, time, and effort. Dialoguing is hard work. Engaging in it challenges our very human urge to cut to the chase, and "win" the argument by wrapping the discussion up, and settling matters our way. When we look at the toll of broken relationships and divided teams, however, it becomes apparent that investing in dialogue is well worth it. In fact, we cannot afford *not to* dialogue with both colleagues and our loved ones.

Suggested reading:

Isaacs, William. (1999). *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*. New York, New York: Currency Doubleday.



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“Survive Your Career:” A Note to Those Entering the Field of Corrections

A Canadian Perspective

I have worked in the field of Corrections for 20 years now in various capacities. The most rewarding one is being a leader and trainer in CISM (Critical Incident Stress Management) and EAP (Employee Assistance Program) for much of the entire 20 years, which can see me travelling across Canada. I perform similar trauma-related duties in a second career outside of Corrections for our communities as well.

Here’s the deal, folks: when you start a career in Corrections, things are about to change and in particular “you” are about to change. A career in Corrections is a solid and rewarding career, but it does not come without a price. You are about to enter a work environment where your “clientele” really doesn’t want to be there, sees you as the reason they are there, and will take out their anger from various origins on you the first chance they get. Then there are the constant “con games” in which offenders can attempt manipulation to meet their needs, and have second and third agendas in their presentations with you. There’s also the ever present possibility you could be subject to physical and emotional violence intermittently or continuously depending on the security level and unique dynamics of each institution.

So now that you have read that and are considering working at Home Depot instead, I’ll try and give you some gems of wisdom to help you survive. I will leave the physical survival to those that will train you in such with the caveat that **the mind and body are connected, and what happens to you physically registers with your psyche as well**. CISM and EAP are put in place to help you to deal with not only traumatic experiences you may be involved in within a career, but they also educate you on how to become resilient against OSI’s (operational stress injuries) so that you build a psychological body armour, as it were. Take these lessons to heart. They can balance the negativity, cynicism, and disillusionment that can creep into your personality as a result of being immersed in a work environment where being on edge can save your life. There is a term, hypervigilance, which briefly means that in the morning you suit up (literally or metaphorically) to work in an institution, “you’re on,” being hyper aware of everything so you can survive your day. Should you not be able to shed this mindset post shift and instead it becomes a lifestyle, you can become very difficult to live with. Post shift, take 30 minutes or so to shift from Correctional Staff to family member.

Here’s an example. All day long we issue directions to offenders. They are expected to comply when told to, in a timely manner. If not, they suffer consequences. Try that at home I hope the garage is heated! Talk to your family and have them understand to give you a few minutes to make the shift. It’s a good and necessary practice.

Got a support network? If yes, good. Keep it and grow it. If not, get a support network that involves those you trust, those that you may work with, but, perhaps more importantly, people that don’t work in Corrections. They represent a reminder that there exists a world where everything is not skewed and everyone is not a criminal.



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"Survive Your Career" (continued from page 3)

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Get to know stress in your body and behaviour, what it looks like, what it feels like, what hurts, and how you behave when stressed. Learn these things, and when you're stressed do something truly helpful about it. There is some great literature on the topic, but be sure it's a reputable source.

And here's now a new term. PTED. Yes, PTED, not PTSD. PTED stands for Post Traumatic Embitterment Disorder. You won't find it in the DSM-5. It is out of a mental health journal from Germany, and it refers to when experiences in an organization or system result in core beliefs that individuals hold as accepted truth being shattered. The Correctional world can often not seem to make sense. Or those making decisions and policies can seem detached from the realities of the front lines. Many times I speak to those just starting out full of optimism and pride and a will to make a difference only to speak to them a few years in, and everything is "BS" and everyone is an "a--hole." I ask them, "What changed?" Did the system or organization begin to operate differently than in the past? They respond indicating that the organization has always been "f...d up." So that means that the individual has changed. They're now struggling with PTED. Post Traumatic Embitterment Disorder.

Earlier on I mentioned the "price" you pay for a career in Corrections. This is an example of what I meant. Core beliefs that have been shattered due to work experiences need repairs. So, **be safe, be aware, and put safeguards in place to "Survive Your Career" heart, body and soul!**

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Book Review *Passing It Along: Wisdom from Corrections Staff, Vol. 1*

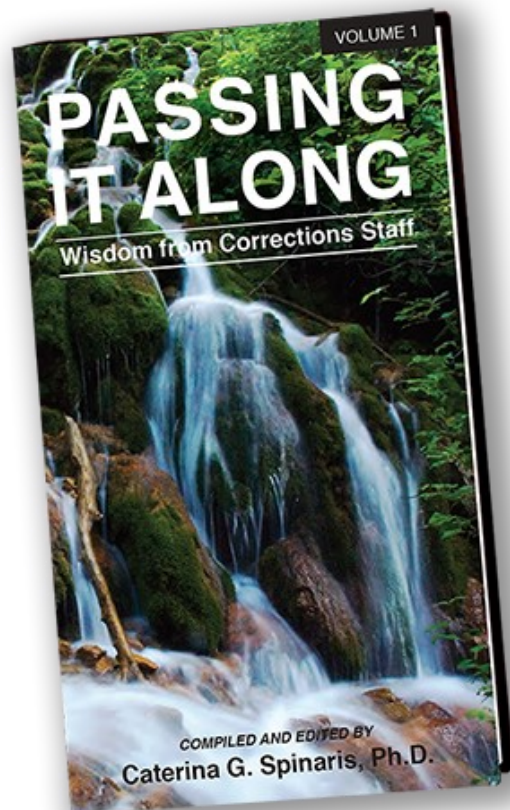
By Ron Sands, LMHC, CEAP (Retired)

This book is a compilation and collaborative effort of a variety of professionals in the field of corrections—from the floor officer, supervisor, warden, educator, librarian, and other supportive persons' sharing their experience, strength and hope. It is brilliantly portrayed in the stories that provide sound and practical advice about what makes for a safe, honorable, healthy, and meaningful career in this important and vital profession.

The purpose of this volume is candid and broad-brushed, which serves to satisfy both the palate of those interested in entering as well as those presently serving in the field of corrections.

This volume tells the frank truth about "criminal justice," and I do not mean the "PC" version, but the honest, day to day life of loyal, dedicated, selfless professionals who serve and protect our society. It addresses the three dimensions of our human being—physical, mental, and spiritual.

This product appeals to the persons who serve, and does so from the perspective of a **proactive, early intervention-prevention model**, by addressing the various maladies that can become byproducts of a career in corrections. The application of this information from the newbie to the seasoned veteran can help promote healthy public safety for the offenders, personnel, and even society at large. It includes the importance of self-care for the employees, and maintenance of meaningful relationships with their family, friends, and other loved ones too. These support systems and suggestions presented in the book can ameliorate negatives and promote resiliency for those employed in a dangerous and highly stressful occupation.



Passing It Along: **Wisdom from Corrections Staff** Caterina Spinaris, PhD, Editor

Special Introductory Offer: \$3.99 per copy plus \$&H
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Askew: Our Worldview

2016 © Susan Jones, PhD

In our travels around the country I continue to see remnants of my former corrections self. Recently, before we went to New Orleans, my daughter was giving us suggestions for places to see and things to do. She also included a description of the French Quarter, including a stop at Café Du Monde. When she finished her description, she added: "By the way, you know that area of town is kind of dangerous." Her concern was sincere and based on her recent travels.

As I thought about our conversation later, I was amused. As a retired corrections professional, I see danger not only where it exists, but also where it does not exist. My skewed worldview was still with me, even four years after I walked out of a correctional facility. As we traveled through the city of New Orleans I was mindful of how my past experience affected the way I saw this city. I realized that as I saw people interact with each other, I assumed the negative and I saw potential trouble.

Yet, maybe that group that looked like they were involved in gang business was really just a group of young adults that were bonding over a shared, non-criminal interest. Maybe the tagging we saw on so many buildings was a remnant of a time in the distant past. Maybe that person trying to look like they belonged in the group of tourists was not really casing the area for victims or easy loot. All of these things are possible, but I didn't believe any of them. I saw gang members, potential crime victims, and criminals on the prowl. Was I wrong?

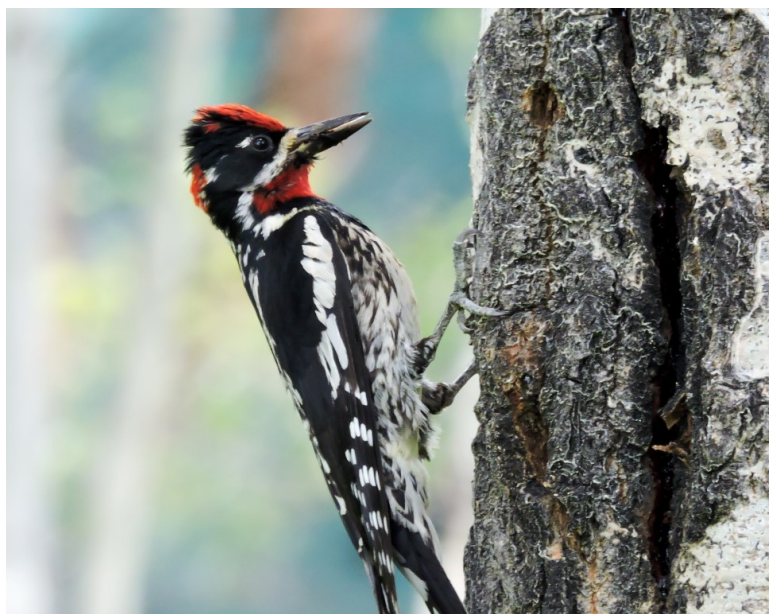
My husband and I saw the parts of the city that we had heard about all our lives, but we were careful. Having a skewed worldview comes directly from the work that we had done for a combined total of 55 years working in prisons. I know that we see danger where it sometimes does not exist, but we also see danger where in fact it does exist. Just because no one else around sees the same things does not mean that we are wrong. The corrections environment may make us more suspicious and more untrusting, but sometimes we are right to be suspicious.

The real question is where do we draw the line between the reality of the circumstance and the skew our past may have contributed to how we see the environment? Part of the answer to this questions is a process of fact checking – merely talking about our perceptions with others in the same situation.

Of course, these "others" need to be people that have not also worked in a prison environment for a lengthy period of time. Do others see a situation the same way? Or do they see our interpretation as being extreme, unfounded, and "out there?"

This is not a fail-safe method to try to get to the truth of the situation, but it may help to put words to these perceptions, and it can help to re-align our view of the world more realistically. It may also help to re-align the view of others who may end up being more careful and observant in future interactions as a result of talking with us.

Just how far askew is your worldview? Does it need a re-alignment?



Part 3: What Is Psychological Trauma? When Trauma Shatters Our Basic Assumptions

2016 © Caterina Spinaris, PhD

A prior version of this article was published in the Correctional Oasis, November-December 2005 issue. This topic of basic assumptions being shattered when people are victimized by traumatic experiences was first addressed and studied in a systematic way by Ronnie Janoff-Bulman in 1989.

When CO Smith was caught in his first “large group disturbance” (aka a riot) in the chow hall, he dissociated and froze. Surrounded by 200 offenders who were throwing around food, plates, kicks, and punches, he remained transfixed. The last conscious thought that flashed through his mind before he “checked out” was that this was the end of the road for him. When he came to himself, partly due to the ear-piercing din in the room, and partly due to staff surrounding him and asking him if he was okay, he couldn’t believe that he had just stood there. Deep shame about not responding as trained washed over him. “I never expected to just freeze!” was all he could think. How could he explain to anyone (including himself), what happened, and why he let his partner across the room down by not taking action as he should have? CO Smith felt so defeated, he started to question his courage and his ability to do his job. The taunts and biting comments of his coworkers in reaction to his freezing did not help any. His view of himself as a warrior lay shattered in the depths of his mind. In its place now stood the specter of a coward.

Exposure to a traumatic stressor can shake us to the core, rattling us emotionally and causing an earthquake in the domain of cherished core beliefs about ourselves and about life.

When trauma tears our “safety bubble” apart—our expectation that we or our loved ones will be protected from harm—it can also decimate our expectation that we will rise to the occasion and deal effectively with whatever life dishes out to us, or that what happens to us will be fair, or that life events will follow a logical or comprehensible sequence.

What can happen instead is that our basic positive assumptions in areas of importance to us are shredded and replaced with opposites regarding our beliefs about our efficacy and our invulnerability, our beliefs about other people’s trustworthiness or benevolence, and our beliefs about the meaningfulness of life in general.

Here are some core beliefs and expectations which can be negatively and extremely distorted by trauma.

Expectations of personal invincibility and immortality. Assumptions such as, “I can handle whatever comes my way,” or “Nothing bad will happen to me,” may be replaced with “I was overwhelmed,” or “I almost died.”

Expectations of justice and fairness. Assumptions such as “Justice always wins in the end,” or “If you do the right thing you’ll be rewarded,” may be replaced with “It makes no difference how decent of a human being you try to be; you’ll still get railroaded,” or “The crooks end up getting away with murder.”

Expectations of predictability. Assumptions such as, “My life is unfolding as planned,” or “I know what’s coming next,” may be replaced with “Life is chaotic, totally out of control,” or “My life is in shambles—all that matters to me is gone.”

Expectations that people will be “good.” Assumptions such as, “People are basically good /decent /honest,” may be replaced with “People are con artists /thugs /evil.”

When Trauma Shatters (continued from page 7)

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Expectations that life events will make sense. Assumptions such as, “If you’re a good guy bad things won’t happen to you,” or “If you never smoke, you won’t get lung cancer,” may be replaced with “Bad things will hit you out of the blue, whether you’ve been good or bad,” or “It doesn’t matter how healthy you try to live, you can still get sick.”

The shattering of these basic assumptions about safety, predictability, justice and meaningfulness of life can leave trauma survivors in a state of bewilderment. It is as if they find themselves in a game where the rules have changed, but they can’t make sense of these new rules, and there’s no one available to explain the changes to them.

The journey of healing after trauma involves (among other components) the ability to repair these shattered core beliefs by moderating the extreme pendulum swing caused by trauma. Traumatized people who get better learn to view their crushing experiences through the lens of a more balanced and accurate assessment than the all-or-nothing perspective of traumatic stress. They pull back from overgeneralizations and, instead, learn to moderate their thinking. They understand—and accept—that there may be a degree of randomness in life, but that there is also a degree of predictability, justice, and order. They accept that “bad” circumstances that happen to them may also be incubators of opportunities and new beginnings. Sometimes, instead of “Why me?” they learn to say, “Why NOT me?” And they choose to trust again that there is still goodness in this world, and that it is “better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.”

Suggested further reading:

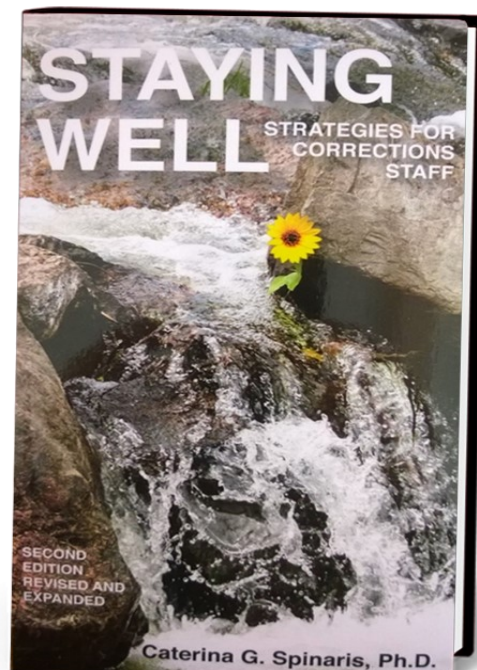
1. Janoff-Bulman, R. (1989). Assumptive Worlds and the Stress of Traumatic Events: Applications of the Schema Construct. *Social Cognition*, 7, Special Issue: Stress, Coping, and Social Cognition, 113-136.
2. Janoff-Bulman, R. (2010). *Shattered assumptions*. Simon and Schuster.

Staying Well: Strategies for Corrections Staff, 2nd Edition

By Caterina Spinaris, PhD

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Correctional Officers: Staying Strong

by Carl ToersBijns

Reprinted with permission from corrections.com, where it was first published on 7/11/2016.



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For many, the phrase “stay strong” implies a level of physical fitness, a body-tone or a musculoskeletal system that keeps you going when the daily challenges of the job are overwhelmingly not in your favor, due, for example, to the current housing patterns that pit officers against an enormous number of inmates.

However, what we need to seriously take into consideration are the things that make you “mentally strong.” After all, most of the job requires you to be alert, to think, and to solve complicated problems.

Just like we can have bad habits that rob us of our physical strengths, there are bad habits that rob us of our mental energy and ability to focus on what we are truly responsible for on or off duty—our self-control.

Exercising your “mental muscle” is very important as it is the main tool for awareness you have to possess to do your job at its best and to perform your duties at the peak of your efficiency and abilities.

This habit of exercising your mind, along with the hard work and dedication you have put into your job as a correctional officer, shall reap you the success and rewards you are looking for.

Realize that from the moment you hit the “line,” you see the environment as a very negative place to work in. Therefore, to offset this negativity you must begin your thoughts by realizing your blessings to possess a better perspective than those you are supervising behind bars. Show your gratitude for your blessings through your behaviors and deeds.

Never surrender your personal power to others, especially the inmates. Giving negative people your power defeats your purpose or presence there, and drags you down. Accept responsibility for your decisions and don’t waste your time blaming others or making excuses.

Equally important is to trust yourself and to be realistic about your job and its expectations. There is no entitlement to your job – just expectations.

Accept all challenges willingly but cautiously. View adversity as an opportunity to become better and stronger, as with each obstacle you overcome, you gain confidence and become better at the job.

Don’t waste your time on things you cannot control. Instead focus on the things you can control. Doing so will give you more positive and productive results, and a more useful delivery of your energy.

Correctional Officers: Staying Strong (continued from page 9)**Page 10**

Know your job and its limitations. Boundaries serve specific purposes to create better emotional and physical resources to work and grow with. Your setting boundaries may cause grief to some, but it provides you the opportunities to become better and be safer at what you desire to do.

Don't be a risk taker. Use your mental power to identify risks, and to create that "comfort zone" you know will keep you safe.

Reflect on the past, but do not dwell on it. You cannot live a life with regret and expect to grow mentally. Learn from your mistakes. Remember that some failures are positive steps towards your growth in wisdom, personally or professionally. In every case of adversity, there is an opportunity to learn and understand things better than before.

As an individual and as a professional, create your own role and your own definition of success. Don't play "follow the leader." Don't resent the success of others, but, rather, recognize your own abilities and seek achievements of your own. Do not limit yourself.

Keep your mind healthy by doing healthy things.

Use your mental energy wisely. Don't throw it away on irrelevant things that resemble gossip, whining or complaining. None of that helps you do your job better.

Don't engage in pessimistic predictions. Allow your positivity in life to give you the optimism you need to see reality more clearly than others.

Acknowledge the fact that with your job comes some level of emotional pain or discomfort. This is where you find yourself challenging yourself to maintain self-control and the energy to stay true to your own morals, values and ethical conduct that you set out to live by from the very beginning of this journey as a correctional officer.

Being a correctional officer is not a popularity contest. It's a viable and respectable job that ensures secure and safe conditions for all. It can be a most fulfilling career path to choose and take if you remain mentally strong. Tolerating discomforts is like a good workout at the gym. No pain, no gain.

Reference:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/what-mentally-strong-people-dont-do/201606/18-things-mentally-strong-people-do>

Corrections.com author, Carl ToersBijns, (retired), has worked in corrections for over 25 years. He held positions of a Correctional Officer I, II, III [Captain] Chief of Security Mental Health Treatment Center – Program Director – Associate Warden - Deputy Warden of Administration & Operations. Carl's prison philosophy is all about the safety of the public, staff, and inmates.

Miscellaneous

⇒ Recent events have once again brought home the stark reality that public safety work of any type is very much indeed HAZARDOUS work. From the murder of CO Mari Johnson in Texas, to the death of CO Christopher Moules in PA during a scuffle with an inmate, to the shooting of police officers in various parts of the country, the possibility is once again brought home to us all that, for public servants, reporting for duty may mean not coming back to one's earthly home alive or in one piece. WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE.

⇒ In mid-July we discovered, through Norton by Symantec, that Desert Waters' website had been hacked and was seriously infected with a virus. We are so very thankful to Norton for flagging that and blocking the site. And we are greatly thankful to [Wordfence](#) for cleaning up our site, and for making all necessary updates and recommendations. We can't say enough good things about the professionalism, sophistication, caring, and thoroughness of Wordfence employees. If you have a website, we highly recommend Wordfence to you. And we apologize for any inconvenience you may have experienced while trying to log onto our site a couple of weeks ago. The good news is that desertwaters.com is running virus-free and smoothly again!

⇒ Caterina Spinaris was part of the team that prepared and presented the Broadcast entitled "Corrections Stress: Peaks and Valleys" offered by the National Institute of Corrections on June 22, 2016. You can access the broadcast and related resources clicking [HERE](#). Thank you, Maureen Buell and Leslie LeMaster of the National Institute of Corrections for your hard work that helped make this broadcast happen!



Desert Waters Correctional Outreach



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IN MEMORIAM

CO Mari Johnson

July 16, 2016

Murdered by offender
French M Robertson Unit, TDCJ

CO Kristopher Moules

July 18, 2016

Died during altercation with offender
Luzerne County Correctional Facility, PA

Quote of the Month

*Things turn out best for the
people who make the best of
the way things turn out.*

~ John Wooden

Many Thanks!

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the mission of Desert Waters.**

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DWCO Mission

To promote the occupational, personal and family well-being of the public safety workforce through the provision of support, resources and customized data-driven solutions.